

3-15-1944

Notes: Lenten Address: Dismas Preaches (Luke 23:42-43), 1944

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Far away - if we had space - this apt. on Calvary.

TEXT

LUKE 23, 42-43

THEME

Dismas Preaches

OCCASION

Valparaiso March 15, 1944.

I never came
until Good
Friday

1. Our preacher this evening ^{was} one of the nameless immortals in the history of the human race - he is important only ^{the attitude of the Supreme Father of human life} because he typifies an area of human experience - a certain truth - certain lessons which our forgetful age must learn all over again - ^{yet} he has a right to be here - like having the Unknown Soldier at the peace table - his significance rests in his universality - when we listen to him we hear the voices of nameless ~~un~~ forgotten millions who bear the real burdens of the world - whose mistakes ~~are~~ ^{are} on our very own - even now -
2. Known in the history of the Church - the Good Thief - the ^{one who} Penitent Thief - by tradition Dismas - his day: March 25 - 35 yrs. ago a remarkable revival of interest in him - led by a Chicago newspaper man - Daily News March 25 - a remarkable editorial - three choruses named after him - all within prison walls - that's all - except for the fact that one day about noon he said nine words to God on a Cross which sum up everything that the human heart can ^{ever} say to the Eternal - which bring heaven nearer than the sound of a whisper in a quiet room - let us hear:
3. I do not imagine that you are very much interested in my life - at least not in the details - let me just tell you a few things which are so universal that there must be some one in this church ^{down} tonight to whom my ~~xxx~~ experience may be of value either as a warning or as an example.
4. First thing I would like to say is that it was very easy to go wrong - like everything else in life the journey into evil is a step-by-step process - & the first ^{step} is always the hardest - after that it gets easier & easier - when I committed my first crime I was scared, but I soon got over that - it was so easy - easy to live outside the law - easy to get by with things - easy to regard myself as the great exception to the law of crime & punishment - others, I ~~was~~ ^{was} had been caught, but I was sure I wouldn't - I'd get by somehow - I was the special case to whom the rules didn't apply

Too away -
Storage
middle room - small
else will space.

Dismas

You see me
on a Cross

action follows thought
action often precedes thought

5. Then came my second mistake - because I got by ^{with} doing wrong I began to think wrong - and here I come very close to the 20th Century. esp. the younger generation - I was free - nobody was going to tell me what to do - no parents, no law, no God - I thought, as your whole world thinks, that freedom means the right to violate ^{on} the laws of God and man - that I could live as I pleased - that I was free to go after all the money I could get, all the pleasure I could find, all the power I could reach -
6. And I kept thinking that until the very last minute - all during ~~my~~ trial I was still hopeful - something had always happened when I was in a jam - surely it would this time too - when the judge pronounced the word "guilty" - when they dragged me out to the hill beyond the gates I was still hoping against hope - last-minute reprieve - but then something happened - they laid me down on the cross, took my hand & placed it on the crossbeam + started to drive a nail through it - and with the first flash of blinding, tearing pain, I knew I was through - this was the end - suddenly I saw my life, now & at last, in one piece - the nail was tying things together - I saw all that I might have been & all that I had become - the shame, the folly, the failure, the fatality of my years - this was, as you say, the pay off, the drops of blood from my hands & my feet - the fearful agony of creeping death -
7. That's my story up to nine o'clock ^{on that} Friday morning - interested in its meaning? - your preachers, I understand, are taught at the Seminary to preach the law & the Gospel - well, this is the law - the soul that sinneth it shall die - the scales of justice may be off balance for a long time, but they always return to normal again - God may not balance his books every
- the Supreme Judge

TEXT

THEME

OCCASION

day, but in the end he always does - you can get by with many things for many days, but in the end life and time and God catch up with you - they're all moving in one direction, together and there's no getting away from them under the sun or the unblinking sky -

8. I hope you will not think that I am telling you this in order to frighten you into leading a good life - fear is a poor & rotten foundation for goodness - that's why your prayers always say that the law cannot save anybody - no, I am telling you all this only because I would like to have you understand clearly what happened next - unless you begin to feel my desperation & my loneliness - the utter hopelessness of my stricken soul - you will not be able to follow the events of the next three hours -

9. There we were - the three of us on three crosses against the blue sky of an April morning - some of you have learned in these days of pain & separation & tears that the human heart ^{is able} can get used to almost everything - & so, after the first sharp, stabbing pain of the nails had become steady and before the last fever had begun I had a chance to look around - not the usual crowd which gathered at crucifixions - satisfy the black human impulse to take pleasure in the suffering of others - there were some important looking people there - church-people - priests, scribes, pharisees - they paid no attention to us - concentrating on the cross in the centre - I shook my head to clear away the fog of pain - they were cursing, jessing, moaning - they seemed to have a personal, bitter hatred for the man on the Cross in the centre - they seemed to consider his suffering a personal triumph for themselves - that crowd, I suddenly saw, was a mob - a yelling, jessing, inhuman single animal - the sort of thing you see at a lynching -

OCCASION

it has happened a million
times since that morning & no
one has yet explained it in human
terms

10. And so with an effort I turned my head and looked at the man on the cross in the centre - now don't ask me just what happened then - (recent motion picture) For those who believe in God no explanation is necessary; for those who do not believe in God, no explanation is possible - all I know is that I saw in Him the exact opposite of every thing that I was & every thing that I believed - I saw in Him a goodness which I didn't believe existed in my cynical world - the measureless dignity of suffering power - the quiet waiting for a victorious end.

11. My eye turned upward to the inscription above his thorn-crowned head: "Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum" - Suddenly I knew that that inscription was true - He was a king - a king in exile going home, brave banners down, a suppliant from pain - and yet a king whose kingdom, I thought, would be a wonderful place to live - a place of peace and joy and glory -

12. For a moment, I must admit, I thought of asking Him to take me with Him when He would be ready to go - but I dismissed that thought immediately - there was no chance after that - heaven after a life like mine? - the in the company of angels and archangels? No, I knew I had no future - no chance - I was getting what was coming to me - and the thing to do was to face it - and die!

13. And yet I wanted to say something to Him - I wanted Him to know that I believed in Him - I wanted Him to know that I knew that He had a future - that He was not going to die as I was dying - without hope - that for Him the rest was not silence but song & life & victory - I wanted Him to know that He had a friend in the crowd who would be more than satisfied with anything He might want to give -

* Somebody
had stumbled
on the
truth

TEXT

THEME

OCCASION

14. And so - you will recall - I turned to Him & whispered: "Lord - I know it was a small thing & a great thing to ask - beyond tears & beyond ~~page~~^{time} - the old, old human cry, the longing never to be stilled, not even in a heart like mine - that somewhere, sometime; when all is said and done, someone might remember us, think back to us, pay to our fading memory the tribute of a passing thought - Just like you, I did not want to be forgotten - O Lord, my God & my King, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom -"
15. You all remember what happened then - He turned and looked at me; "Today" - the word fell on my heart, confident, triumphant, unshadowed by any doubt or fear. "Today thou shalt be" - ^{xx}there is a constant procession - several hundred have died since I began to speak - that night. two figures - hand in hand - the King & the thief - the judge and the sinner - God with His man & man with His God - surely then he never been a stranger companion - ^{just to} meeting at the crossroads of our ways of sorrow & going on together beyond the sunset into a new & eternal morning -
16. And that, my friend, is your religion - that is your faith - your hope - you must be afraid of nothing - in life or in death - better than I you must know nothing today - join me. "Thy arms" are strong around me; and I know That some how I shall follow when you go To the still land beyond the evening star Where everlasting hills and valleys are And evil shall not hurt me any more And terror shall be past, and grief, and war."
- I learned that about 3 o'clock one Friday afternoon - and it is a wonderful thing to know - 19 years ago some

as always,
God gave
more, in truth,
more, than
I would -

the first
bought with
my own
cost blood
that by
one trip
to Calvary
on G.F.

at the new of Calvary